

Second Sunday of Easter

IMPLICATED/EXONORATED

Acts 2:14a, 22-32

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Analysis by Ron Starenko

14But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them,...22“You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to by God with deeds of powers, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know – 23this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. 24But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. 25For David says concerning him,

‘I saw the Lord always before me,
for he is at my right hand so that
I will not be shaken;
26 therefore my heart was glad, and
my tongue rejoiced;
moreover my flesh will live
in hope.
27 For you will not abandon my soul
to Hades,
or let your Holy One experience
corruption.
28 You have made known to me the
ways of life;
you will make me full of
gladness with your
presence.’

29“Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. 31Forseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying,

‘He was not abandoned to Hades,
nor did his flesh experience
corruption.’

32This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses.”

DIAGNOSIS: Implicated (v. 23)

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Keeping Our Distance*

In his first sermon, on the Feast of Pentecost, Peter, having found his courage, comes out swinging, indicting his audience: “You crucified and killed” Jesus of Nazareth by using the Romans, heterodox heathens “outside the law,” to do your dirty work, thus absolving yourselves. In much the same way, do we not distance ourselves from what happens in the world around us, exonerating ourselves, staying above it all, with our own set of rules, excusing ourselves from any and all involvement or incrimination?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Denying*

It’s another way of saying, “Not me!” We call it denial. Like Adam and Eve in the garden, justifying themselves, pleading, “The devil made me do it!” Or, like the Sunday football pros quickly retracting their hands after committing an infraction, as if to say, “I’m clean!” Pilate washed his hands, absolving himself of consenting to Jesus’ execution, as if to say,

passively, "Not my doing." That notwithstanding, the Jewish mob is out for blood, screaming, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" At the same time they are believing that it was those heathen Romans "outside the law" (v. 23), unlike us law abiders, who were the real perpetrators: "Not our doing!"

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Blaming, Then Blamed*

To take it a step further, if we refuse to see our complicit evil in this dreadful drama, along with the Romans and the Jewish rabble, who had no qualms about their participation in the atrocity, who then is left to blame? Reflexively, even if we are reluctant to admit it, we turn to blame God, besides others, for our predicament, like Adam in the garden who blames both the woman and God, in order to exonerate himself. It seems as though everyone involved in the history of sin from Adam to Pilate is determined to be blameless by blaming, a hopeless effort. And those who are committed to living by blaming are destined to the hell of eternal blaming, that is, until and unless Someone puts an end to the vicious cycle.

PROGNOSIS: Exonerated (vv. 27, 31)

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Blame Accepted*

That is, unless that Someone intervenes and accepts the blame, God owning his damning justice by "handing (Jesus) over (to be) crucified and killed" (v. 23), exonerates us. Therefore, when God "raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power," (v. 24) and since his soul was not abandoned to hades and he did not experience corruption" (Luke quoting Psalm 16:8-11), we were freed from its power, like Jesus, crucified and killed, and also raised up to be exonerated, to be, as Martin Luther put it, "as alive and whole and true as Jesus Christ himself."

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Faith*

Emboldened

What else can a poor sinner do, now exonerated before God, set free, made alive, now incorruptible even in the face of death, what else than to affirm with the Psalmist, "I will not be shaken...my flesh will live in hope." (vv. 25b and 26b)! Indeed, life is full of quakes, from the earth, the market, our health. Money offers no promise, fame no guarantee, pleasure here-today-gone-tomorrow. The scepter of the grave looms daily on our news bulletins, signaling how destructible we are. To meet such quakes head-on, requires something more than self-determination. It takes a faith, born in a crucible, as we answer back, joined to the victory of Jesus, having died and been raised in him by means of our baptism and by our participation in his Supper, knowing that we will never be abandoned any more than Jesus was. Now, how solid is that hope?!

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Witness Rendered*

Indeed, if Jesus is incorruptible, then so are we. His destiny is ours. And that is now our daily walk. If God is for us, then who and what can be against us (Rom. 8:31)? We live and die, perhaps even killed and crucified as Jesus and his first followers, martyrs—we know of such in our day—united with him, his witnesses, as those, like him, who consider it a joy to endure the cross and disregard its shame (cf. Heb. 12:1-2), also singing with the Psalmist, "You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence (v. 28)." However we are implicated in the horrors of humanity, and though we are always facing the judgment of God, we are exonerated, getting to live out our days in the image of Jesus, who is raised incorruptible.